

February 23, 1962

Dear Mr. Shriver--

Some notes on the Columbia-Presbyterian proposal.

1. First principles: this is, of course, a highly reputed outfit, especially well-known for its clinical strength in neurology, especially epilepsy. On this basis alone, there is no doubt that they would be entirely worthy of help. However, my own capacity for more detailed comment is limited by two factors: (a) I don't have the general picture of the Foundation's resources, and the other claims on it to make a useful judgment of priority, and (b) the chief strength of this group is in its clinical orientation, and thus outside my special competence.
2. For a more detailed evaluation, I would have to raise the following questions. Who is actually behind the proposal, and would furnish the leadership for its implementation. It is signed by Merritt as Vice-President: is he actually involved any longer in research affairs?
3. To my own mind (and this is a highly personal outlook), Columbia's real strength has been its neurobiochemists, people like Kabat, Nachmansohn and Waelisch. They are not even mentioned here.
4. Perhaps because the proposal was intended to be addressed to an administrative more than scientific respondent, it does not give a clear picture of what new activities would be furthered by the grant. But possibly, the existing programs are seriously hindered to the point where relieving them would justify the expenditure. Would it serve to attract the enthusiasm for research in mental retardation of any people not already fully committed to it?

These are not criticisms so much as questions founded in my own remoteness from the setup, and they certainly should not be taken as the only way to look at what might be a very powerful activity in its own lights.

Sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg

SHRIVER